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ABSTRACT

The Educational Learning and Enrichment Center (ELEC) entered into a contract with the Houston Independent School District (HISD) (Texas) to provide a community-based alternative education program for HISD eligible students who had dropped out of school and were considered to be at risk of not completing their basic education. The 1996-97 evaluation indicated that 296 students were enrolled in the high school equivalency (GED) program in the 1996-97 school year. Of that number, 177 obtained GED certification providing a certification rate of 60%. This exceeded the performance standard of 35%. Five students participated in ELEC's Texas Assessment of Academic Skills program, and these students remained at their home schools. ELEC exceeded the defined performance standard for participation in the various counseling programs. Overall, the program director, faculty members, and students surveyed indicated satisfaction with the ELEC GED program. Appendixes contain the student and faculty surveys. (Contains four tables and one reference.) (SLD)

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ED 428 173

RESEARCH

Report on an Educational Program

Department of Research and Accountability

Educational Learning and Enrichment Center (ELEC), Inc. 1996–97

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Executive Summary

Educational Learning and Enrichment Center (ELEC) 1996-97

Introduction

Program Description

The Educational Learning and Enrichment Center, Inc. (ELEC) entered into a contract with the Houston Independent School District (HISD) to provide a community-based alternative education program for HISD eligible students who had dropped out of school and were considered to be at risk for non-completion of their basic educational experience. Criteria for being at risk are defined in §29.081 of the Texas Education Code (TEC), and are detailed below.

In accordance with the *Texas Education Code, §29.081*, the at-risk student is one in danger of dropping out of school, and includes each student in grade levels 7 through 12, who is under 21 years of age, and who:

- was not advanced from one grade level to the next for two or more school years;
- has mathematics or reading skills that are two or more years below grade level;
- did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100, in two or more courses during a semester or is not maintaining such an average in two or more courses in the current semester, and is not expected to graduate within four years of the date the student begins ninth grade;
- did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered under Subchapter B, Chapter 39; or
- is pregnant or is a parent.

In accordance with the TEC, all ELEC students were less than 21 years of age, and fit at least one of the parameters specified in §29.081; none of ELEC's students were concurrently enrolled in another educational program.

The Educational Learning and Enrichment Center stated its mission as ensuring that students enrolled in ELEC's program received the academic skills and services required to enable them to obtain their GED certification. Beyond that basic goal, ELEC fosters the provision of their target population with the basic skills needed to enable students to progress to institutions of higher learning. The curriculum presented by ELEC at its various locations was in compliance with the GED program requirements, as detailed and mandated by the State of Texas.

In addition to evaluation of program records, surveys were distributed to the Program Director, faculty members, and a sample of students, in order to obtain data by which to determine the program's day-to-day operations. To accomplish those ends, the following issues were evaluated:

1. Did at least 35 percent of students enrolled in ELEC's GED program obtain GED certification?
2. Did at least 25 percent of TAAS students pass Exit level TAAS?
3. Did at least 200 students participate in ELEC's various counseling programs?
4. What were the perceptionsof the Program Director, faculty, and students with regard to the adequacy of the program?

Findings

- ELEC had a total of 296 students enrolled in its GED program during the 1996–97 academic year. Of that number, 177 obtained GED certification, providing a certification rate of 60 percent. ELEC exceeded the performance standard of 35 percent.

- During the 1996–97 academic year, only five TAAS students participated in ELEC's TAAS program, and those students remained enrolled at their original schools, rather than being enrolled at ELEC. Inasmuch as no TAAS eligible students

were enrolled at ELEC, there was no performance standard in force.

- Of 296 students enrolled in ELEC's GED program and 1,732 students enrolled in the pre-GED program, 770 participated in the various counseling programs. ELEC exceeded the performance standard.

- Overall, the Program Director, faculty members, and students surveyed indicated satisfaction with the ELEC GED program.

Recommendation

Stipulations in ELEC's contract with HISD held ELEC accountable for any student enrolled in their program during the contract period. Compliance with performance standards, as stated in that contract, was calculated in terms of those students in the GED program, rather than program-wide enrollment. As with other similar contracts, it is recommended that negotiations for contract renewal between HISD and ELEC specifically state the requirements that will make ELEC accountable to the District relative to compliance with performance standards. Parameters recommended would require a student to be enrolled and in daily attendance in class for a period of not less than ten weeks, and/or student accumulation of a minimum of 200 program hours prior to inclusion of that individual in the database of students for whom ELEC is held accountable at the end of the contract period.

EDUCATIONAL LEARNING AND ENRICHMENT CENTER (ELEC) 1996–97

Purpose: *To evaluate the performance of the Community Based Alternative Education Program's General Educational Development (GED) Program, as currently administered by the Educational Learning and Enrichment Center (ELEC).*

Design: *Descriptive/Compliance*

Population, Sample: *Students enrolled at the various ELEC facilities during the 1996-97 academic year. These students were dropouts, or students otherwise at-risk for not completing their education.*

Methods: *Evaluation was based on data obtained during site visits and from questionnaires administered to the Program Director, faculty members, and a sample of students, as identified by the Program Director and various members of the faculty. Level of contractual compliance was based on data provided by school personnel.*

Findings: *Performance Standard One required 35 percent of students enrolled in ELEC's GED Program to obtain GED certification; of 296 students enrolled in that program during the 1996–97 academic year, 177 attained that goal, and exceeding the contractual stipulation. Performance Standard Two required that 25 percent of TAAS students pass Exit Level TAAS Exams; no TAAS students enrolled during this academic year, thus the standard was not in effect. Standard Three required a minimum of 200 students to participate in ELEC's counseling programs; ELEC exceeded this standard, with a total of 770 participants.*

Conclusions: *ELEC has met and exceeded all required performance stipulations. Additionally, ELEC has succeeded in garnering the approval of its faculty and the student population that it served.*

Introduction

Program Description

The Educational Learning and Enrichment Center, Inc. (ELEC) has contracted with the Houston Independent School District (HISD) to provide a community-based alternative education program for HISD eligible students who have dropped out of school and are considered to be at risk for non-completion of their basic educational experience. Criteria for being at risk are as defined in §29.081 of the Texas Education Code (TEC), and are detailed in the subsequent chart. Students enrolled in the ELEC program are at least 17 years of age and under 21, and are not concurrently enrolled in another educational program.

ELEC's offices are located at 10700 Northwest Freeway, Suite 210, Houston, Texas 77092. Offices for faculty and administrative personnel are at this location; classroom facilities are placed at eleven separate facilities throughout the greater Houston area. The stated mission of the Educational Learning and Enrichment Center is to ensure that students enrolled in ELEC's program have received the academic skills and services required to enable them to obtain their GED certification, and to provide that population with the basic skills needed so that, having obtained GED certification, students may progress to institutions of higher learning. The curriculum presented by ELEC at its various locations is in compliance with the GED program requirements, as detailed and mandated by the State of Texas.

At-Risk Criteria

In accordance with the *Texas Education Code, §29.081*, the at-risk student is one in danger of dropping out of school, and includes each student in grade levels 7 through 12, who is under 21 years of age, and who:

- was not advanced from one grade level to the next for two or more school years;
- has mathematics or reading skills that are two or more years below grade level;
- did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more courses during a semester or is not maintaining such an average in two or more courses in the current semester, and is not expected to graduate within four years of the date the student begins ninth grade;
- did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered under Subchapter B., Chapter 39; or
- is pregnant or is a parent.

Program Cost and Funding Source

HISD's program at ELEC received an allotment up to $772,820.00 ($12.63 per student), based on an anticipated enrollment of 400 HISD eligible students. Reimbursement to ELEC was through Average Daily Attendance (ADA) funding.

Purpose of Evaluation Report

The purpose of this report was to determine the level of compliance effected by ELEC in the administration of the GED Alternative Certification Program managed by ELEC during the 1996-97 academic year. In addition to evaluation of program records, surveys were distributed to the Program Director, faculty members, and a sample of students in order to assess the program's day-to-day operational status. The following issues were evaluated:

1. Did at least 35% of students enrolled in ELEC's GED program obtain GED certification?
2. Did at least 25% of TAAS students pass Exit level TAAS?
3. Did at least 200 students participate in ELEC's various counseling programs?
4. What were the perceptions of the Program Director, faculty, and students with regard to the adequacy of the program?

Method

ELEC's administrative offices at 10700 Northwest Freeway were visited twice during the 1996-97 academic year; contact was made with the Program Director and the Program Manager on both occasions. Additionally, ELEC program sites located at Sam Houston High School, Sharpstown High School, Westbury High School, and the Harris Country Boot Camp, were visited. Multiple sites were visited in order to evaluate the day-to-day functioning of the program and faculty members, and to observe teacher-student interactions.

Surveys were developed and distributed to assess the concerns, opinions, and perceived levels of effectiveness of the program from the viewpoints of the Program Director and Administrative Officer, students (Appendix A), and faculty (Appendix B). Survey instruments for faculty and students employed statements with responses presented in a Likert scale format; five response options were offered for each statement, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" and "N/A." Degree of agreement with forced-choice items was rated from one to four (1 - 4), on a four-point scale, with one and two (1 - 2) indicating disagreement and three and four (3 - 4) indicating agreement. Three open-ended items required both teachers and students to provide narrative responses. Sixty-two students and nine faculty members completed survey instruments; students completing surveys for this evaluation were selected by the school's faculty and the Program Director. The Director's Survey consisted entirely of open-ended questions. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the level of program compliance with contract requirements. Compliance was determined by contrasting actual program performance with contract stipulations, and obtaining percent of compliance, as stipulated by contract.

Project Demographics and Survey Sample

Gender distribution of the student survey sample is presented in **Table 1**. Of 62 ELEC students surveyed during the 1996–97 academic year, 55 percent were African-American, 29 percent were Hispanic, 133 percent were White, and two percent Native American. Complete data are presented in **Table 2**.

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Student Sample

Gender	n	Percent
Male	41	66
Female	21	34
TOTAL	62	100

Table 2: Ethnic Distribution of Student Sample

Ethnicity	Student Population		Survey Sample	
	n	Percent	n	Percent
Asian	15	<1	1	2
African-American	1,174	58	34	55
Hispanic	620	31	18	29
Native American	1	<1	1	2
White	218	11	8	13
TOTAL	2,028	100	62	100

Results

Did at least 35% of students enrolled in ELEC's GED program obtain GED certification?

ELEC had a total of 296 students enrolled in its GED program during the 1996–97 academic year. Of that number, 177 obtained GED certification, providing a certification rate of 60 percent. ELEC exceeded the performance standard of 35 percent.

Did at least 25% of TAAS students pass Exit level TAAS?

During the 1996–97 academic year, only five TAAS students participated in ELEC's TAAS program, and those students were still enrolled at their original schools, rather than being enrolled at ELEC. Inasmuch as no TAAS eligible students were enrolled at ELEC, there was no performance standard in force.

Did at least 200 students participate in ELEC's various counseling programs?

Of 296 students enrolled in ELEC's GED program and 1,732 students enrolled in the pre-GED program, 770 participated in the various counseling programs offered. ELEC exceeded the stated performance standard; these data are presented in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Percent of Compliance to Performance Specifications

Specification	Percent
Thirty-five percent (35%) of enrolled students will obtain their GED certification.	100
More than 25% of TAAS students will pass Exit Level TAAS.	n/a†
At least 200 students used the program's counseling services.	100*

*770 counseling program participants
†Refer to RESULTS for details.

What were the perceptions of the Program Director, faculty, and students with regard to the adequacy of the program?

These issues are addressed in the section titled Survey Data.

Survey Data

Summary of Director Comments

The Program Director for ELEC described the program as being developed to provide students with the academic skills required to obtain GED certification; as part of that process, academic assessment and general counseling were provided to enable students to focus on their goal of obtaining certification. In terms of unique aspects, ELEC differed from other GED programs through engagement in community service (e.g., the provision of Thanksgiving and Christmas food baskets to needy families), emphasis on parental involvement through monthly meetings with parents or guardians of students, and collaboration with local industry in providing summer jobs for students. ELEC's mission, the provision to its students of the academic skills required to obtain GED certification, as well as to progress to institutions of higher learning, was reinforced by a team of twelve faculty members, an Average Daily Attendance clerk, and a program manager.

At the time of admission to the program, all students were evaluated using the Texas Assessment of Basic Education (TABE), for purposes of placement in the pre-GED or GED programs, and to discern the appropriate level within those programs for each stu-

dent. Students received four hours of instruction each day and, if an individual student required additional assistance, he or she had the option of coming early or remaining after class in order to receive individual tutoring from his or her teacher. Classes were held from 8:00 A.M. to 12:00 P.M., Monday through Friday; one campus had an after noon session that met from 1:00 P.M. until 5:00 P.M., Monday through Friday. Computer labs were available at two of ELEC's locations.

According to the Program Director, program success has been determined by student success (i.e., numbers of students obtaining GED certification). Additionally, and as a function of the individualized attention provided to students, the ability of the individual student to address and resolve problems was also considered as a measure of program success. Available community resources such as day care, runaway hotlines, and services for abused and neglected children were accessed on an *ad hoc* basis.

The Director reported its major obstacles as being poor attendance, and indicated that daily attendance would improve the GED pass rate at all ELEC locations. Concern was expressed that certain students (i.e., those withdrawn from regular classrooms because of behavioral problems) appeared to have experienced harassment from school-based campus police officials, and had been treated in a manner indicative of these particular students having been "targeted" by campus officers. While acknowledging that ELEC students were far from "perfect," the Program Director did express concern with the potential of this issue.

ELEC's goal for the coming academic year is to serve more students. Expansion of ELEC's program base is integral to attainment of that goal, and may be accomplished by moving into more schools in the Houston area and placing programs in additional correctional facilities.

Summary of Teacher Survey

When surveyed, ELEC faculty perceived teacher dedication and willingness to provide extra help to a troubled student as being the program's strongest point. One faculty member indicated teacher motivation as being "unconditional," while another praised the bond often observed between faculty and the students with whom they work. Teachers were complimentary of support received from personnel at the schools in which GED classes were held, and expressed further appreciation for the quality of management received from ELEC administration.

Recommendations for program improvement included the need for increasing space allocation, for more texts, and computer software. Weaknesses were expressed in more site-specific terms, such as the need for longer class hours at the Harris County Boot Camp facility (e.g., from the present 1-1/2 hours in the morning and again in the afternoon, to three or four consecutive hours), or the inability to take a chalkboard into jail facilities due to security reasons. One faculty member expressed concern regarding keeping students focused and on-task; this concern may be a program-wide issue.

Sixty-two (three percent) of the 2,028 students enrolled at ELEC during the 1996–97 academic year completed and returned GED Student Surveys. Analysis of student data revealed varying levels of concurrence with 12 statements that addressed program issues, to include ability of teachers to challenge students, development of student creative abilities, and ability of teachers to relate GED program materials to that taught in other classroom settings. The percentages of student agreement with each of these statements are presented in **Table 4**.

It should be noted that the percentage of agreement indicated for statements six and nine are a reflection of data points falling at the extreme ends of the distribution. In cases such as these, the percentage of agreement is not a reflection of those outlying data points serving to decrease the amount of agreement. Rather, it is a consensus of opinion.

The statement concerning development of leadership skills reflected a consensus of 87 percent. When the raw data were examined, it was noted that of 53 students responded to that statement, one "disagreed strongly," two "disagreed," and three deemed the statement "not applicable; the remaining 47 students do not necessarily indicate the true degree of consensus, as some "agreed" and some "strongly agreed." This was observed again in the statement regarding teachers' ability to relate GED coursework to that taught elsewhere. Fifty-one students responded to this statement; six "disagreed," seven indicated the statement to be "not applicable," and the remaining 38 students concurred with the statement.

Student perceived program strengths included generic abilities of teaching staff, with comments such as "My teacher is very nice, helps a lot, caring, and very hardworking," "Miss X is a wonderful teacher," and "My teacher helps me to realize how important my

Table 4: Student Opinion: Percent of Agreement

Statement	Percent Agreement
1. Teachers encourage and challenge students to do their best	100
2. The GED Program provides an adequate advanced course options	96
3. Course work is challenging and exciting	94
4. Class activities encourage critical thinking	90
5. Class activities promote creativity	91
6. Class activities encourage leadership skills development	87
7. Class activities promote decision-making opportunities	96
8. Homework amount is appropriate	96
9. Teachers relate program material to that taught in other classes	75
10. Teachers are sensitive to needs of students	98
11. Class discipline is maintained	94
12. Students would recommend this program to friends	96

*Percent agreement based on number of students marking 3 or 4 on the survey item.

education is." Weaknesses were related primarily to lack of space and equipment. A number of students indicated that more classroom space was needed, and that text books and research materials were in short supply. Several students requested longer class hours, more homework to improve abilities in specific skills, and a desire to see more students enrolling in the GED program.

Discussion

Performance Standards

ELEC's data indicate a total of 296 students as having been enrolled in the GED program during the 1996-97 academic year, 177 (60 percent) of whom obtained GED certification; none of the pre-GED students were indicated as having obtained that status.

The total enrollment experienced by ELEC during the 1996-97 academic year was 2,028; the contract into which ELEC entered with HISD projected a total of 400 students for that same time period. In raw numbers, the larger figure is most impressive; however, had all students who enrolled remained in the program through attainment of the GED, each of ELEC's nine active teachers would have been responsible for the guidance of 225 students. As the data indicate, an enrollment figure of 296 GED students is reflective of 33 students per teacher. On observing that 177 of the 296 enrolled GED students did receive GED certification, and realizing that each of ELEC's nine teachers successfully guided 20 (19.6) students to that goal, ELEC's accomplishment is impressive.

Recommendation

Stipulations in ELEC's contract with HISD hold ELEC accountable for any student enrolled in their program during the contract period. Compliance with performance standards, as stated in that contract, was calculated in terms of those students in the GED program, rather than program-wide enrollment. As with other similar contracts, it is recommended that negotiations for contract renewal between HISD and ELEC specifically state the requirements that will make ELEC accountable to the District relative to compliance with performance standards. Parameters recommended would require a student to be enrolled and in daily attendance in class for a period of not less than ten weeks, and/or student accumulation of a minimum of 200 program hours prior to inclusion of that individual in the database of students for whom ELEC is held accountable at the end of the contract period.

Reference

Houston Independent School District and Educational Learning and Enrichment Center (ELEC). (1996). Agreement between Houston Independent School District and Educational Learning and Enrichment Center (ELEC). Contract approved by the Houston Independent School District School Board on August 1, 1996.

APPENDIX A

GED PROGRAM STUDENT SURVEY

INSTRUCTIONS: *The goal of this survey is to help us understand how you feel about the GED Program. We would appreciate you taking a few minutes to answer the questions in this survey. Your answers are very important to us. Please do not write your name on this survey, so that your answers will be anonymous. When you have completed this survey, please return it to your teacher who will send it to the HISD Research and Accountability Department.*

Thank you very much for your cooperation!

Please use the scale below to tell us how you feel about the following statements.
Please mark the appropriate boxes for each sentence.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
1. The teachers at my school encourage and challenge me to do my best.	A	B	C	D	E
2. The GED program provides me with an adequate variety of advanced course options.	A	B	C	D	E
3. My course work is challenging and exciting.	A	B	C	D	E
4. My classroom activities encourage critical and analytical thinking (to think harder).	A	B	C	D	E
5. My classroom activities promote the development of creative abilities.	A	B	C	D	E
6. My classroom activities encourage the development of leadership skills.	A	B	C	D	E
7. My classroom activities provide opportunities to make decisions.	A	B	C	D	E
8 The amount of homework assigned by my teacher(s) is appropriate.	A	B	C	D	E
9. Teachers in the GED program relate their material to courses taught by other teachers.	A	B	C	D	E
10. The teachers in the GED program are sensitive to the needs of the students.	A	B	C	D	E
11. My school is able to maintain good discipline in the GED classrooms.	A	B	C	D	E
12. I would strongly recommend the GED to my friends.	A	B	C	D	E

13. What is your gender ?
A Female **B** Male

14. To which ethnic group do you belong?

Asian	African American	Hispanic	Native American	White
A	**B**	**C**	**D**	**E**

15. In your opinion, what are the major strengths (good points) of the GED program at your school?

16. In your opinion, what are the major weaknesses (areas that need improvement) of the GED program at your school?

17. If you have any other comments on how to improve the GED program, please write them in the space below.

Thank you very much for participating in this survey.

APPENDIX B

GED Teacher Survey
1996-97

Please answer the following questions and return the survey to the Department of Research & Accountability. The purpose of this survey is to learn more about GED, your perceptions of its effectiveness, and any recommendations you may have to better serve your students. The answers will not be used to assess staff.

Using the scale below, put a check in the box that best represents your opinion.

	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
1. Intake and assessment procedures at this GED programprovide teachers and staff with adequate information to serve students' needs.	1	2	3	4	0
2. The instruction provided at this GED program improves students' basic academic skills.	1	2	3	4	0
3. This GED programprovides students with necessary basic skills to continue on to other educational institutions.	1	2	3	4	0
4. This GED program assists students in seeking further educational opportunities.	1	2	3	4	0
5. This GED program provides students with necessary job search skills.	1	2	3	4	0
6. This GED program assists students in seeking employment opportunities.	1	2	3	4	0
7. This program is able to address students' needs better than the traditional school setting.	1	2	3	4	0

8. In your opinion, what are the major strengths of this program?

9. In your opinion, what are the major weaknesses of this program, if any?

10. What recommendations would you make to better serve the students who are enrolled in this program?

Thank You for Responding